Incident Investigation

By understanding what incident investigation and causal analysis are and how you can help, you can prevent accidents and make a safer workplace – before losses occur.

Concepts and Terms

- **Incident**: Unwanted event that could reduce productivity or cause danger
- **Near miss**: An incident without losses and an indicator that a condition or practice could cause injury/damage
- **Accident**: An incident resulting in loss/injury
- **Causal factors**: Direct or indirect factors contributing to the occurrence of incidents
- **Direct costs**: Immediate costs of an incident, such as property loss
- **Indirect costs**: Secondary costs of an incident, such as lost productivity

Investigation Basics

WHY do we typically conduct incident investigations?

- To comply with laws and regulations
- To help protect us from liability
- As part of the overall insurance claim submission processes
- To prevent the same or similar incidents from happening again

WHEN do we typically conduct incident investigations?

- After incidents
- When people submit observations
- During proactive audits, inspections or observations

WHO should be involved in incident investigations?

- Anyone with input
- A variety of people/perspectives (not just the supervisor or safety professional)

Incident Management

After you've been notified of an incident or observation and addressed all medical issues and secured the scene:

1.	Identify losses (if any) and gather information.	**Investigative Process**
2.	Analyze the information, determine the reasons (or causal factors) and prioritize the risks.	
3.	Develop action plans.	
4.	Track all associated tasks and report corrective action progress.	
5.	Identify and eliminate risks.	
6.	Record and share what you learned during the process.	

Information Gathering

Begin an investigation as early as possible and repeat it to achieve the best results.

Complete information gathering as soon after an incident, near miss or observation as possible. If you need to make changes to improve safety, make note of the “before” and “after” conditions.

Some of the ways you may gather information include:

- Documenting
- Interviewing
- Photographing
- Sketching
- Collecting
- Reenacting

Interviews

During interviews:

- Avoid judgment and be humble
- Collect personal accounts
- Choose a convenient time
- Choose a private place near the scene
- State the purpose of the interview
- State how you’ll use the information
- Show curiosity, interest and concern
- Focus on listening and learning
- Don’t lead witnesses into answers
- Show and explain your notes
- Close with thanks and next steps

Photos/Sketches

When you take photos and draw sketches:

- Make a visual representation of the scene
- Capture relative positioning of evidence, damages and anything that seems out of place
- Consider witness perspectives/vantage points
- Include size and color references if these details are important
- Take pictures BEFORE you collect evidence

For major incidents, don’t delete “bad” photos. If you do so, people may accuse you of trying to prove your opinions are right instead of trying to document the truth.

Physical Evidence

Physical evidence can be used to test causal theories. After incidents, establish a **chain of custody** and protect and preserve physical evidence from damage and contamination. If you have any questions about what evidence to preserve or document, consult your management or corporate counsel.

Benefiting from Investigative Findings

To make the most of your investigative findings, you should communicate incident details and look for trends:

- Multiple near misses predict higher accident probability
- Training about a safety topic may lead to fewer incidents
- Fast corrective actions predict low incident likelihood

Causal Analysis

There are many causal analysis methods. No single method is best for all types of investigations. Regardless of the method you use, it’s important to remember that accidents don’t simply happen because someone makes a mistake. We need to understand why someone made a mistake.. Asking “**Why?**” is a simple causal analysis approach in which you simply ask why as many times as you need to in order to get to the causal factor.